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Psychology of Sex: The Evolutionary Scandals

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Abstract. This article describes the rudiments of evolutionary psychology as they pertain to the incidence and prevalence of sex scandals and their political consequences.

One facet of evolutionary psychology posits that adaptive challenges confronting humans who lived long ago were instrumental in the development of today's gender differences in preferences for casual sex partners and for long-term mates. Although many of the adaptive challenges of the past may no longer be present, the gender differences in preferences are. In essence, much as critiques of contingency planning suggest that military authorities are ready to fight the last war, current human preferences effect past adaptive success and may be inconsequential or even nonadaptive for today's challenges and those of the future.

Following the arguments and data from evolutionary psychology, one learns that female preferences are for love and for protection as constituted by a partner's ambition, industriousness, political power, material well-being, and the desire to share the fruits of these attributes. On the other hand, one learns that male preferences are for love and for physical attractiveness as reflected by a partner's youth, clear skin, symmetrical features, good health, and the like. Both sets of preferences reflect not only what today would be termed sexism but also the tyranny of sex for they are founded on the sine qua non of adaptive success--the transmission of one's genetic material or genetic material similar to one's own to future generations. (Counters to this view include the notions that preferences [1] are not adaptive but merely nonadaptive byproducts, [2] have not developed because they are adaptive but later are coopted in the service of adaptation, and [3] are delusional social constructions.)

Evolutionary psychology can be used to illustrate the most typical of political sex scandals--involving the male politician and his female lover. The politician reflects the female preferences, the female lover the male preferences described above. These preferences are operative for casual sex (as well as long-term mating). They also reflect human evolutionary heritage and "what has worked" in the past for adaptive success.

Yet evolutionary psychology also posits that humans are not necessarily at the mercy of the past. Humans do have the capacity for self-control and self-change. And to a certain degree, the adaptive challenges of today's environment may influence the content and pressure of today's preferences as they affect behavior.

In essence, the political leader in a sex scandal is a victim of temporal desynchrony. In another time, he would have been overtly respected and admired--even if covertly maligned. In his own time he is overtly maligned--even if covertly respected and admired. (Other contemporary reactions such as judging sexual behavior as irrelevant or inconsequential may reflect flux in the continuous development of preferences.) Evolutionary psychology gives new meaning to the time-worn phrase, the wrong place at the wrong time. (See Barkow, J., Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1992). *The adapted mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture*. Oxford University Press; Buss, D.M. (1994). *The evolution of desire*. Basic Books; Gould, S.J. (June 26, 1997). *Evolution: The pleasures of pluralism*. The New York

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